

Witchcraft – the salem witch trials essay sample



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Some of the earliest accusation of witchcraft can be dated back to 1484 in Germany. Many men and women were persecuted, tortured, burnt and even killed because they were believed to be witches under the devil's control. In this essay I will talk about what witchcraft was, who was accused of practicing it, the social response in Salem and what social and religious factors are given to account for the harsh response to witchcraft.

The direct definition of witchcraft is the use of supernatural or magical powers. It was often believed that these powers were under the direct influence or guidance of the devil. Witchcraft could be found in the form of incantations, charms, and conjurings and were associated with criminal offences, misdeeds and ruins. Many of the unexplained misfortunes of the village were blamed on witchcraft (for example, babies that died before baptism, crops that failed, men that could not beget or women that could not conceive).

Those that perform witchcraft are considered to be witches. Historically witches are usually (but not exclusively) women. The first people to be accused as witches were the heretics of the towns. Anyone who opposed or had a problem with the church was considered to be a witch. The number of people who fell into this category increased tremendously with the Protestant reformation and the rapid spread of the poorly translated Bibles. But the accusations grew from the heretics to the scapegoats of the town. Anyone who did not attend church or was undesirable (for example Goody Good in the Crucible) had a greater possibility of being accused as a witch. At the height of the witch hunts and trials those that questioned authority or

the proceedings of the trials were also quick to be accused of serving the devil and being a witch.

The initial social response to witchcraft in Salem was driven by fear. However the responses were instigated by the social structure that was set up even before any accusations of witchcraft occurred. For example women were considered to be subservient to men. This even played out with the young girls of Salem. They were limited in what they could do to occupy themselves during the day. They were not allowed to sing or dance or engage in make-believe. They were expected to be quiet and still. When the girls of Salem were caught dancing, their reaction was to prevent punishment. Reverend Parriss is that were getting into and starting to cause the problems with the witch trials. The reason they did this was because they were bored. Girls in this time were thought of as less than boys and were not aloud to do anything constructive. Thus they got into trouble.

This trouble made the adults of the town fearful and suspicious of the girls and the fact that there might be some witchcraft in the picture. The adults then tried to prove scientifically that there was no witchcraft and were unsuccessful because the girls were just pretending (but the adults didn't know that). Once they couldn't prove it scientifically they turned to the supernatural explanation and looked for a witch to blame. The first person to be hung in Salem was an old, undesirable, beggar women. After her many other innocent women and men were accused. It took only a few individuals to act against the common social response, which was to go along with what the church was saying. A few individuals were very moral and said that what they were doing wasn't right. How they were killing innocent people was not

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the right way to solve this. These people would not confess to what they didn't do and would even sometimes take blame for other people. These few people put a stop to the accusations and the witch trials.

The harsh response that was given to witchcraft was the fact that people were dying. From a religious view this all started when the fall of Christianity and the rise of the Protestants started. The Protestants with the help of the printing press translated the bible for the people of towns. These people misinterpreted the bible and thought it said that women would either be like Virgin Mary or a witch. Thus women were more suspicious and accused more and killed more. From a social stand point they acted harshly out of fear. All the people were looking for a scapegoat.

In conclusion the witch trials were a very dark time in our history and a very unsure time. Anyone who was accused of being a witch was almost always killed and many others were tortured.